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PelhamNEWS

Reporter wins police award

BOB TYMCZYNSKY/
POSTMEDIA NETWORK

St. Catharines Standard reporter Bill Sawchuk learns to use a gun on the firing range at the Niagara Regional Police training facility at the Welland campus of Niagara College. For more on Bill's award see Page 3.



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Extension sought for 9-year-old Fenwick subdivision project

WAYNE CAMPBELL

Special to Postmedia Network

While Pelham town council given a nine-year-old subdivision plan a one-year extension, it says this is the last time.

Woodlands subdivision, a proposed strip of 20 large houses along Balfour Road between Canboro Road and Welland Avenue in Fenwick, was first proposed in 2007.

Since then the developer has come back asking for extensions to the plan in 2010 and 2014.

The company did com-

plete a two-house first phase on Canboro Road. The yet-to-be started second phase will consist of 18 houses along Balfour Road.

Planning director Barbara Wiens told council the developer, with a June 2 deadline approaching, recently asked for a two-year extension of draft plan approval.

The company wants to sell the property to a builder and needs more time to complete the deal, she said. Planning staff recommended one year.

Town councillors showed

frustration over the request.

"Why is this so exceptional?" asked Ward 3 Coun. John Durley.

Ward 1 Coun. Richard Rybiak wondered how this would affect future east Fenwick housing developments. They will extend east from Woodlands on Balfour to Cream Street.

Wiens said the east Fenwick development is awaiting completion of a second-order plan to organize proposed subdivisions and services in an area that could serve 1,000 residents. The completed Wood-



John Durley

lands subdivision plan falls under older planning guidelines that permit large lots and homes, she said. New developments must have greater density with smaller lots to conform to recent provincial and regional planning directions.

Ward 2 Coun. Gary Accursi said Woodlands subdivision homebuyers may be annoyed to find smaller lots open behind them. He suggested putting some sort of notice in sales agreements to warn buyers. Durley said the motion for the one-year extension

of Woodlands draft plan approval should include a condition that no further extension will be considered in the future. Council inserted the clause.



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Standard's Sawchuk receives police media award

ANDREA TINGEY
Postmedia Network

St. Catharines journalist Bill Sawchuk has earned recognition for his reporting related to Niagara Regional Police.

The media award was presented by Chief Jeff McGuire at the annual police awards banquet two weeks ago. It is Sawchuk's first NRP award for his work.

"It was important to me because of who was giving the award," said Sawchuk, who attended the event with his wife Crystal Ramsey.

"That respect and appreciation I have for the police, I don't always get a chance to express it because of the nature of what I do."

Sawchuk said he believes

That respect and appreciation I have for the police, I don't always get a chance to express it because of the nature of what I do."

Bill Sawchuk

his award has something to do with his involvement in "Wanted Wednesdays," for which he spreads awareness of Niagara's wanted through his journalism.

"I was on board with that right from the get-go," he said.

"I was honoured and humbled that they would select me," said Sawchuk, who has been covering police and justice

for about three years and has a regular interview web show called Chat with the Chief.

Const. Phil Gavin said the media award is given to a reporter who is co-operative in their coverage of the police.

"That award is given to someone who works with us in a fair and balanced way," he said.

Police also recognized former CHCH journalists Lauran Sabourin and Dwight Penner for their work.

Other awards were given to police officers, students and other community members.

Recipients included workers at the Rich Products plant in Fort Erie for their work on an ammonia leak there in July of last year.

Awards for officers included for retirement, years of service and for bravery and valour.

Sawchuk said he hasn't found a spot for the award yet, but he won't be placing it above his fireplace.

"I will find a spot for it. Not on the mantle because the cat jumps up there and the cat likes to knock stuff off, so I have to find a spot."



Bill Sawchuk

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Niagarans are shuckers for Falls oyster house

It's the kind of foreshadowing you would expect of a youth spent eating pizza and hanging out at the local strip mall.

But regularly sinking his teeth into a slice of Volcano pizza at the corner of Portage and O'Neill in Niagara Falls came fall circle for Mike Langley when he and wife Kat Stevens opened Niagara's first oyster house nearly two years ago.

Ever since, Tide and Vine has become a favourite meeting place for bi-valve-loving locals and tourists — and at the very least, an indication of a future swoon-worthy meal if not a carer — with every shell shucked.

That's exactly how the couple envisioned it when they opened in 2014.

"The goal was to have someone in construction boots having a beer and oysters next to someone in a tax eating lobster and caviar and drink-



**TIFFANY
MAYER**

ing champagne," Langley said. "That sums up what we're doing here — to have that wild demographic of people here." They haven't had that tax-sporting customer yet, but there have been plenty of suits, and cars in the lot that make their little patch of pavement near a bank, pharmacy and luxury food joint look more like a fancy auto dealership some days.

On a quiet Wednesday afternoon, though, my 16-year-old sub-compact with its rusty war wounds isn't out of place. Mind you, I did park in front of a consignment shop.

Still, it may be about as sharpening their shucking knives and opening their

doors, despite the oyster's cult following and regular appearance in folklore. (Napoleon reportedly ate them before battle, Jonathan Swift marveled that anyone was willing to eat them at all.)

Langley and Stevens, who hail from New Brunswick, put the proverbial wheels in motion for their restaurant in 2012 when they drove their lime green VW van into the region and officially launched Niagara's second food truck. Pearl, as they dubbed her, became a regular fixture at food festivals; the long lineups winding their way toward her a sure sign she was a culinary gem.

"I grew up eating oysters and loving oysters," Stevens said about the mollusk's allure. "There's something appealing about them. People have strong reactions to oysters."

The couple, who had been living in Toronto and shucking at a popular downtown oyster bar, chafed into the possibility

the region was fertile ground for a sustainable seafood purveyor when they'd visit Langley's family. They'd stop to sample the terror at local wineries, and found encouragement from others in the local culinary scene.

"In Toronto, everyone is competition and here no one sees it as competition. They see it as a contribution to what's happening," Langley said.

At the time, many restaurants were championing local farm-to-table but the couple took their chances on their imported ingredients. People seemed shell-shocked to have the talents of Langley and Stevens — both hold multiple shucking championship titles — in their midst. Finally there was someone serving the "merlot" of Olynapias, Kumamoto and Raspberry Points in Niagara.

"We got to show people their first oyster," Langley said about those early days with

Pearl. "So when we opened Tide and Vine, people had a picture of what we had in mind."

Sans the disposable plates of food truck service, and in a temperature-controlled 24-seat eatery whose stylish interior has made the rounds on Instagram.

"The first plate of oysters I shucked here, I served it and said this is what I intended all along," he recalled.

Along with those ice-filled pans of half-shells is a menu that includes Stevens' substantial seafood chowder, creative spins on the po' boy, like bulgogi style with gulf shrimp, oysters served up like chicken wings and other thoughtful, scratch seafood dishes. Land lubbers aren't forgotten either. There's always an option that didn't come from the ocean.

There were other stops along the way to their full-service restaurant, including testing the waters at Silversmith Brewing in Niagara-on-the-

Lake, where they catered bar snacks to go with the beer on tap. They're still a fixture there, and they also supply local restaurants who've added oysters to their menus.

The couple are also in process of adding another 25 seats to the oyster house and reconfiguring the joint to allow for larger groups and special tasting dinners — something they're certain wouldn't have been possible had they not had the wisdom to start with Pearl.

"If we had just opened the doors," Stevens reflected, "I don't think we would have worked."

Scrip Mail Gems is a monthly feature of Eating Niagara that focuses on the standout eateries sandwiched between the convenience stores, late-night diners and big places throughout the region. Got a favourite hole in the wall I should know about? E-mail eatingniagara@gmail.com or tweet @eatingniagara.

A better approach to homelessness

Niagara Region has an opportunity to soon do some real good if it has the discipline and courage to put the community before the interests of individual councillors.

In next few weeks, a full report on the homelessness count in Niagara will be tabled at the Region. Although likely to contain several caveats related to the difficulty in collecting definitive data — it's more complicated than issuing a simple census — it will provide the clearest picture to date about where our poorest citizens can be found and how many are there.

That data ought to be a powerful guide for how Niagara Region chooses to allocate resources to build subsidized housing units.

To do so, however, councillors must put aside the personal agendas and think



**GRANT
LAFLECHE**

beyond their town or city limits.

I sat down last week with St. Catharines Mayor Walter Szendik, for whom improving how the Garden City assists those who need is a major preoccupation, and asked him about social housing.

He's made the "compassionate city" a key plank of his administration. The idea is to transform the corporate culture at city hall so that all members of staff — from parks and recreation personnel to the mayor himself — are trained and ready to assist those in the community who

need it. If the city treats citizens with more compassion and understanding, he believes, the entire city benefits.

As a result, Szendik is an advocate for a related concept called "housing first," adopted by communities across North America, including Niagara, to one degree or another.

Essentially, the idea is that if a community can provide stable shelter for the homeless, it becomes much easier to grapple with the reasons those people were homeless in the first place, be it unemployment, addictions or mental health issues.

However, as much as Szendik wants city hall to be the driving force of a compassionate city, Niagara's political structure places hard limits on what it can do when it comes to housing.

Szendik, a member of the regional housing board, said

social housing is a regional responsibility. The Region, as the upper tier government, is mandated to handle the file.

A city like St. Catharines can assist by, for example, waiving development fees for a housing project, but it ultimately isn't building affordable housing units, let alone creating its own housing first project.

So that leaves Szendik an advocate at the regional level. "We need to be guided by the data," Szendik said. "If the data showed that St. Catharines didn't need that housing, I wouldn't push for it. I don't expect that is what the data will show."

It is that kind of data-driven, Niagara-first approach that will make a real difference.

But it's not something the region often excels at. Councillors will fight to get money directed at their community, even if from a Niagara perspective those resources

are better spent elsewhere.

St. Catharines and Niagara Falls are likely to be the places most in need of housing, but that may not stop some politicians from asking why those resources aren't going to their communities, even if the need isn't there.

Fortunately, even in the house of disunion that is regional council, there are positive precedents to follow.

Acting against its own nature, council, along with Niagara's mayors, managed to march in step to make a strong pitch to Queen's Park for GO trains.

(Don't buy into the hype that GO trains are definitely, 100 per cent coming to Niagara, however. There is a long way to go yet. The provincial government has offered nothing but a tepid consideration of the idea.)

The pitch worked for two reasons. First, it was driven

using the best, most robust data available. Second, it presented Niagara as a whole, rather than a squabbling bunch of fiefdoms.

It is, when you get down to it, the only way to deal with issues that cross municipal boundaries in Niagara, which is hampered by its two-tier governance model.

Affordable housing and homelessness have to be handled the same way the GO file was. Szendik shouldn't have to compete with his colleagues for a piece of the regional pie for St. Catharines. Rather, the issue ought to be properly regarded as regional in nature, and resources allocated where the need exists.

Until the Region can act in this manner routinely, even the most well-meaning or thoughtful municipal politicians will find themselves faced by unnecessary obstacles.

IN BRIEF

Pelham adopts concussion policy

Pelham will be handing out a brochure outlining the health risks of concussion.

Recreation staff will give it to groups, such as hockey teams and skaters, who rent the area and other town facilities.

Town councillors last Monday accepted a concussion policy, but asked about the liability risk of having one.

Recreation director Vickie van Ravenswaay said the brochure is strictly an educational tool, it does not imply the town is directing concussion safety. That is up to the organization renting the facilities.

The brochure suggests groups have a concussion policy with procedures and follow them, she said. Minor hockey, for example, has one while old-timer hockey teams may not. The organizations provide their own insurance to cover risks.

In the case of areas such

as the skateboard park, the town does not provide supervision. It is similar to use of a sidewalk, she said. Recreation staff, however, do promote the use of helmets and other safety gear the park.

Kids to take the healthy community challenge

Pelham will launch its Healthy Kids Community Challenge during a four-hour event Saturday, June 4, in Marlene Stewart Street Park to outline its free summer programs.

From 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. recreation staff will explain free skatepark lessons—Saturday mornings June 11 to Aug. 27—and a regional swimming meet.

Swimming lessons are Tuesdays July 5 to Aug. 23 and Thursdays July 7 to Aug. 25.

The recreation department will hold a free playground program in Fenwick's Centennial Park Fridays 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. July 8 to Aug. 26.

The town will offer a \$25 helmet credit program to encourage purchase of helmets from local businesses.

Children and families can apply for free Pelham Transit passes for summer activities. For more information go to www.pelham.ca/healthy-kids.

The Healthy Kids Community Challenge is a provincially funded

program for children 12 and under. It promotes the Healthy Kids Strategy to reduce childhood obesity rates.

Niagara's 12 municipalities received \$1.2 million to join the challenge. Pelham's share is \$11,520.

Downtown master plan stands alone

The downtown master plan for Fenwick and Fonthill will serve as a guideline outside, rather than inside, Community improvement grant awarded

Town council's policy and priorities committee last Monday supported a staff recommendation to keep the downtown master plan separate from the official plan.

Planning director Barbara Wiens said staff now use the master plan to assess community improvement plan grants and site plan applications.

As a stand-alone document, it can be more

flexible, she said. Yet, it can still have the power to influence building and street designs during reviews of site plan applications.

The downtown master plan deals with public safety, walking, cycling, accessibility, landscaping, building styles and heights, public spaces and ways to support social and cultural gatherings in Fenwick and Fonthill.

Community improvement grant awarded

Two new downtown Fonthill businesses will receive \$12,147 from the town's community improvement grant fund to renovate the facade at 1507 Pelham St.

They could also receive a matching grant from Niagara Region.

The former Marilee's and Klager's Meats sites are turning into Good Sports

Excellence and The Pelham Street Grille.

Town council's policy and priorities committee recommended the grant last Monday.

Town council cheers Ontario champs

Pelham town council congratulated the Pelham Panthers minor basketball team for winning the Ontario Cup in the under 10 age category.

The Pink Panthers swept the provincial tournament defeating Dundas in the championship game.

Town council presents

certificates to teams from the town that win Ontario championships. Members of the basketball team are: Liah Moccia, Kyra DiGaetano, Sarah Lowry, Charli Thorneville, Myla Novak, Sophia Cino, Kaia Vanasele, Calli Camden, Maya Bolcastro, Isabella Brenzli, Emily Williams and Sarah Hurley.

The team was directed by head coach Andrea Hurley and assistant coaches Mike Hurley and Darren Williams.

—Wayne Campbell, special to *Postmedia Network*

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Niagara housing market still sizzling

DON FRASER
Postmedia Network

Brad Johnstone is on the front lines of a hot Niagara real estate market.

And that relentless demand

for homes in the region continues to drive up prices.

So much so, Johnstone reports 15 per cent of transactions last month brought in more than the asking price.

"There was one in Niagara

Falls with a list price of \$200,000 and it actually sold for \$260,000 cash," he said, with some amazement.

Johnstone said the pace is picking up since 2015 — the area's first year of double-digit

price growth in 20 years.

"And already 2016 is outpacing 2015," said Johnstone, broker of record with the Royal LePage Niagara Real Estate Centre. "We're feeling it right down to Port Colborne, Port Erie. Every

market here is affected.

"It's all coming together to create this seller's market."

One couple from that Falls market can attest to the price spike. Adam and Mel Angeline bought their house in the Stamford Village area four years ago for \$236,000.

In a deal that closes in June, they're selling it for \$310,000 — \$21,000 more than their asking price.

"We did things right," Mel said. "We priced it right on target... and we were hoping for a bidding war at the end."

"And we are one of the lucky ones," she added, noting their new Falls home, not far away, was bought for nearly \$30,000 under its asking price from an initial listing they considered too high.

Recent data for the region is striking. It shows robust sales and price increases are relatively consistent throughout the

region.

Niagara Association of Realtors reported the average residential sale price in April was \$303,805, or 8.8 per cent higher than April 2015.

Meanwhile, the Niagara Real Estate Centre — which also uses Multiple Listing Service system sales — crunches slightly different figures, excluding mobile homes for example.

It reported average sale prices in April at \$317,322 compared to the year-to-date average of \$309,114. The centre reported residential single-family homes prices including condos, in Niagara and Dunnville, are up by 12.9 per cent year over year.

Year over year, April sales are up by 26 per cent in the region. The centre expects the trend to continue over the next few months.

See **REAL ESTATE** Page 9

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SALE OF LAND BY PUBLIC TENDER

FORM 6, Municipal Act, 2001

Take Notice that tenders are invited for the purchase of the land(s) described below and will be received until 3:00 p.m. local time on June 15, 2016, at the Pelham Municipal Building, 20 Pelham Town Square, Fonthill, Ontario. The tenders will then be opened in public on the same day as soon as possible after 3:00 p.m. at the Pelham Municipal Building, 20 Pelham Town Square, Fonthill.

Description of Lands:

Roll No. 27 32 020 021 00500 0000; 1690 Rice Rd, Fonthill; PIN 64061-0255(LT); Part Township Lot 161 Thorold, designated Part 1 Plan 59R0256; Pelham; File No. 14-04 Minimum Tender Amount: \$32,879.46

Roll No. 27 32 020 021 00600 0000, 156 Highway 20 E, Fonthill; PIN 64061-0458(LT); Part Township Lot 161 Thorold, as in R0246955, except Part 1 on SNG13468; subject to an easement in gross over Part 2 on SNG13468 as in SNG13468; Town of Pelham; File No. 14-05 Minimum Tender Amount: \$51,235.80

Tenders must be submitted in the prescribed form and must be accompanied by a deposit in the form of a money order or of a bank draft or cheque certified by a bank or trust corporation payable to the municipality and representing at least 20 per cent of the tender amount. Except as follows, the municipality makes no representation regarding the title to or any other matters relating to the land(s) to be sold. Responsibility for ascertaining these matters rests with the potential purchasers.

This sale is governed by the Municipal Act, 2001 and the Municipal Tax Sales Rules made under that Act. The successful purchaser will be required to pay the amount tendered plus accumulated taxes, HST if applicable and the relevant land transfer tax. The municipality has no obligation to provide vacant possession to the successful purchaser.

For further information regarding this sale and a copy of the prescribed form of tender visit www.OntarioTaxSales.ca, or if no internet access available, contact Elaine Ronald, Town of Pelham Taxation Clerk, at 905-892-2907 ext. 338.

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Niagara housing market continues to thrive

REAL ESTATE FROM PAGE 6

The association said the average number of days houses are listed on the residential market also continues to decrease, and was at 41 days in April.

Johnstone pointed to a number of factors affecting these speedy, pricey sales.

Supply and demand tops the list — there has been a recent decrease in new listings of about 15 percent "and around a 20 per cent increase in buyers."

Among the factors are "locals buying up..." realising our market still has a lower average sale price compared to other areas."

Some of those purchases are for investment only, and it is happening at all levels of real estate. Sales are powering up for both new home and resales, Johnstone said.

"I'd say every market is benefiting."

The third is "retirees... more and more people are looking at Niagara as not their second or

third choice, it's jumping up to No. 1."

Another trend is in people who've grown up in Niagara, left the area, and are now moving their young families back here, thanks to flexible work hours or schedules in their GTA jobs.

As for future trends in Niagara, other areas in the Greater Toronto Area have had real estate markets for many years now.

"And until those other markets cool down, I don't expect we'll see a decrease," Johnstone said.

Patrick Dummitt, president of the Niagara Association of Realtors, echoed Johnstone's key observation.

"The most influential thing I see with this is supply and demand," said the real estate industry veteran. "We're getting multiple offers on just about anything."

The robustness "seems to be right across the board (in Niagara)," he added.

As for the future "all of the indicators are there, with all the perceived developments that are going to go on," he said, including developments likely at the former GM plant on Ontario Street in St. Catharines and near Marlehead in Niagara Falls.

Dummitt said GO train expansion and potential for commuter rail transport at Niagara District Airport also bode well for area real estate numbers.

Affordability also remains a key to this robust market, Dummitt said.

"The average price in Niagara region is \$303,805, and that gets you one heck of a house."

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BOB TYMCZYK/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Broker Brad Johnstone with Royal LePage Niagara is shown outside a Thorold home that sold above its asking price.

Woman's disappearance now being treated as a homicide

JUSTIN DALLABE
National Post

The father of a missing Ontario woman has said his daughter's disappearance from a town in British Columbia is now being treated as a homicide investigation.

Ashley Simpson, a 32-year-old woman from St. Catharines, Ontario, has been missing from Salmon Arm, B.C., where she was working for the winter season, since April 28.

In recent weeks, her family and friends, including her father John Simpson, have travelled from Ontario to B.C. and back in search of her, while spreading the news of her disappearance on social media.

But with still no word on the whereabouts of his daughter, Simpson said the RCMP has changed her status from a missing person to a victim of homicide.

"I don't know what really convinced them to go from missing

to homicide, other than there's until such time that charges are approved in court," she said over the phone.

Cpl. Janelle Sholihet from the RCMP said in an email that the case is ongoing as investigators continue "looking for any information which may assist in locating her." Sholihet said she was unaware of the change in the status of the case, adding that the police force would be unable to comment on an active homicide investigation.

"We don't comment on the

specifics of an investigation until such time that charges are approved in court," she said over the phone.

Nevertheless, Simpson said he and others were asked last Monday to provide police with statements and DNA swabs, which suggests a homicide investigation. He added that investigators have been searching a property on Yankee Flats Road in Salmon Arm, where Ashley was last seen.

"They know more than they're

willing to tell us at the moment," Simpson said.

Ashley's father, one of her sisters and her best friend arrived in Salmon Arm with posters and flyers to hand out on May 4, nearly a week after her boyfriend in B.C. reported her missing. Her cousin and a close family friend had arrived a few days earlier. Police had advised the family to wait before making their way there, believing Ashley could be hitchhiking home.

Simpson said that when he and the others arrived in Salmon Arm, they were not allowed onto the 20-acre property where Ashley had been staying with her boyfriend. He said the RCMP

had searched the grounds with police dogs and search and rescue volunteers, but were waiting on a search warrant before entering any of the buildings.

Still, the group was able to assist in the investigation. "We brought up a few things with the RCMP that we received from Ashley in texts," as well as messages from a Facebook group and from close family friends, at which point the police "seemed to change their direction a little bit," Simpson said.

One of Ashley's cousins has started a Go Fund Me account to help pay for the family's travels and time off work. So far, it has raised more than \$3,500.

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- May 21 Syrians in Niagara 4pm-8pm, Robertson Hall, 85 Church St., St. Catharines 905-685-6589 ext 222
- May 22 Armenian Community Center 3pm-9pm, 156 Marindale Rd., St. Catharines 905-682-6178
- May 22 Social Club Heidelberg, St. Catharines Noon-5pm, 569 Lake St., St. Catharines 905-935-4218
- May 22 UMAC (Latin America) Noon-6pm, Club Roma, 125 Vansickle Rd., St. Catharines 905-988-6070
- May 22 FEWA (Filipino Culture) 11am-5pm, Merritt Community Centre, 7 Park Ave., St. Catharines 905-329-4660
- May 23 Club Roma 3pm-7pm, Club Roma, 125 Vansickle Rd., St. Catharines 905-682-7621
- May 23 Slovenian Lipa Park 1pm-8:30pm, 2860 Olive Street Pelham 905-682-2922
- May 24 Canadian Polish Society 4pm-8pm, 43 Facer St., St. Catharines 905-937-1413



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Growing cry for changes to OMB

ALLAN BENNER
Postmedia Network

Municipal councillors often feel they have no say on planning issues, despite the wishes of the people they represent.

But a growing "grassroots" movement of municipalities across Ontario is working to change that perception, said Welland Ward 1 Coun. Mary Ann Grimaldi.

Grimaldi is Niagara's sole representative on the OMB reform working group, a committee comprised of 17 municipal councillors from communities across Ontario that is leading efforts to rein in the powers of the OMB.

The working group, led by Aurora Councillor Tom Mrakas, held a summit on OMB reform in Markham, last Saturday, giving more than 100 representatives of municipalities from across Ontario an opportunity to discuss their concerns about the provincial organization designed to hear appeals regarding municipal decisions

about developments.

Niagara Falls Councillor Joyce Morocco said she still hears concerns from constituents about a gas station that was built at the intersection of Montrose and Thorold Stone Road—despite the objection of Niagara Falls council.

"The residents didn't want it," she said. "We voted in support of the residents not wanting a gas station there near a school."

The developer appealed the decision at the OMB, council's decision was overruled and now "there's a gas station there."

Now, when Morocco talks with some of the neighbouring residents, "They say, 'I can't believe you passed that bloody gas station near my kid's school.'"

"No we didn't," Morocco said. "We turned it down. It was overruled, and the OMB approved it."

Grimaldi said people from throughout the province shared similar concerns dur-

ing the summit.

"There are certain things that you find in all the different municipalities that we've heard from," she said. "Most of the comments and most of the changes that they would like to see are similar in all the communities."

Several Niagara municipal politicians attended the summit, including in addition to Grimaldi and Morocco, Niagara-on-the-Lake Councillors Jim Collard and Betty Disero also attended the summit.

"The OMB can always do the job better," Collard said. And he said he hopes that as a result of the efforts, the province will do a better job of appointing OMB representatives—people with "a planning

background and an understanding of the law."

Although the vast majority of council decisions don't end up at OMB appeal hearings, but "some do," Collard said.

"For those that do, people are hoping the OMB would pay particular attention to the wishes of the council of the day and the planning that's being addressed as well," he added.

Grimaldi said Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing Ted McKeekin was invited to the summit as well, but sent a letter expressing his regrets for not being able to attend.

However, she said McKeekin has asked the working group for a report from the summit to be considered as part of a review on reforming the OMB the province is conducting.

"We're not done. This is just the beginning," Grimaldi said. She said the next step will be to put together a list of recom-

mendations for the minister.

In the meantime, Grimaldi said support for change is growing.

So far, 80 municipalities have supported a motion that was originally drafted by Mrakas in December. The motion calls on the provincial government to limit the jurisdiction of the OMB to "questions of law or process," and the OMB be required to uphold the decisions of municipal councils unless they are contrary to the processes and rules set out in legislation.

In Niagara, Grimaldi, Wainfleet, Niagara Falls, Pelham, Thorold, and Welland have supported the motion.

In Welland, support for the motion at a meeting in early March was buoyed by some of the problems the Rose City has faced as a result of OMB appeals.

"If we don't want to have

a 17-storey condominium located in the backyards of a nice quiet neighbourhood, we don't have much choice," said Mayor Frank Campion. "Based on provincial legislation as far as infilling and densities and that sort of thing, you're going to lose."

Campion said they feel as though their "hands are tied" regarding controversial planning decisions, because their decisions are often overturned by the Ontario Municipal Board.

"You're afraid if you say no, you're going to end up at the OMB and it's going to be costing you money."

Grimaldi described the efforts for OMB reform as "total grassroots."

People from across Ontario can have their say too, by signing a petition for OMB reform on the www.gopetition.com website.



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